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ABSTRACT

The articulation or suppression of ethnicity among high school students depends on the individual's estimation of the relevancy of ethnicity, an estimation linked to structural factors in society. Data for this ethnographic study were derived from extensive observations of students by a participant-observer at a multiethnic urban high school. The ethnic breakdown of the 1,300 students was as follows: (1) 38 percent Black; (2) 24 percent Hispanic; (3) 23 percent White; (4) 11 percent Asian; (5) 3 percent Filipino; and (6) 1 percent Native American. Fieldwork extended over the course of one academic year and consisted of an initial week of regular classroom observations followed by informal interviews of about 50 students, representing the four predominant ethnic groups and a number of students of mixed background. Six of the faculty and staff were also interviewed to corroborate or challenge the findings. Conclusions include the following: (1) the articulation of ethnicity is based on ritual, conflict, interest, and values; (2) the denial of ethnicity is based on racism and internalized oppression; (3) students frequently suppressed ethnicity to avoid being stereotyped; (4) ethnicity was emphasized during conflict situations that often were not racially based or when promoting individual and group interests; and (5) ethnicity emerged most frequently for Asian and Hispanic students in intragroup situations, but ethnicity was more relevant for Black and White students in an intergroup situation. A list of 42 references is appended. (FMW)

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THE SALIENCE OF ETHNICITY AT A MULTIETHNIC URBAN HIGH SCHOOL FROM THE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

During the past two decades school districts have demonstrated a growing interest in responding to the ethnic and cultural diversity of their constituents. With very few exceptions, most of the current literature that offers prescriptions for sound multicultural education suffers from a lack of experientially-based propositions. Basic information about the fundamental relationship between ethnicity and schooling is inadequate. What difference does ethnicity make? How does it affect the educational process? When are some of the times that it matters, other times when it is less significant? This research was undertaken to address these questions by presenting a description of a multiethnic, urban high school which highlights the salience of ethnicity from the students' perspective.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed an ethnographic design whereby the researcher attempted to understand and describe the salience of ethnicity by becoming a participant-observer for one full academic year at the school site. Fieldwork proceeded with the observation of behavior in its natural setting, conducted as unobtrusively as possible. Because the researcher aimed to capture the complex interaction of people, events, and social forces, her scope was holistic. Behavior was viewed in terms of the wider social context which affected it. Going beyond the reporting of interactions, the focus of the investigation was upon uncovering the meaning which the actors assigned to the events. The basic analytical framework for this research evolved from the keen

attention paid to the interaction of the actor with the setting, the dialectical tension between the internal representation of self and the external event created by society.

DATA SOURCE

The data for this study were derived from extensive observations of students in their classrooms and in more informal scenes, such as lunchtime, before and after school congregation, and student club activities. Following an initial period of regular classroom observations in Mexican-American Literature, Black Literature, and a sophomore English class, the researcher changed her unit of analysis from a classroom to a particular student. Five students, one from each of the four predominant ethnic groups and one of mixed heritage, were each shadowed for one week. Informal interviews were conducted throughout the day, as the researcher questioned the students about the meaning of various events witnessed, seeking explanations that would illuminate the students's meaning structures of a particular situation. The school year proceeded with the researcher interviewing students from as many subgroups as possible, until after interviewing around fifty different students, some more than once, she had covered a representative sample of viewpoints. A second set of students was selected to be shadowed for the purpose of exploring and refining emerging ideas. Observations continued throughout the year. Approximately six of the faculty and staff served as key informants to corrorborate or challenge the findings as they unfolded.

SETTING

The study took place at a multiethnic, urban high school in a northern California city. Waterton High (a pseudonym) was selected for two reasons. First, no one ethnic group comprised a majority of the student population. For the 1985-86 academic year, the ethnic breakdown of the roughly 1300 students was as follows:

Blacks	38%	Asians	11%
Hispanics	24%	Filipinos	3%
Whites	23%	Native Am.	1%

The second reason for choosing Waterton High was that social class was not a confounding issue in that the students were all from families that were working class, lower middle class, or welfare recipients.

Waterton High is located in the city of Waterton, which has been described by its Chamber of Commerce as "the city with more unrealized potential than any other in the area." The population has shrunk to around 75,00 from its peak of around 123,000 during the 1940's. Companies have gone out of business, industries have closed down, and stores have moved out to the suburban malls. Although the city is characterized as one of the poorest in the county in terms of socio-economic levels, it is one of the richest in terms of the racial and ethnic diversity of its people.

Waterton High has always reflected this diverse ethnic mix. Whoever lived in Waterton went to Waterton High. It is estimated that during its population peak perhaps as may as 30% of the student body were non-white. That percentage steadily increased, and by the late '60's, after the construction of the new high schools in the area and the ensuing boundary changes, coupled with white flight to the suburbs, whites were no longer in the majority at Waterton High. At the same time the racial composition

changed, the socio-economic levels also shifted. Waterton High evolved from an academic high school with a good percentage of college-bound students, to more of a business and technical school, a blue-collar school that educated the sons and daughters of laborers, with very few children of professional workers. What happened to Waterton High as its percentage of non-whites and working class students increased is that it acquired a reputation for being "rowdy," a "bad school" where "everybody gets into fights." The school has been stigmatized by outsiders whose harsh criticism has come to be believed and accepted by those on the inside.

FINDINGS

> If you are in Kenya, you say you are an American. If in New York, you are a Californian. In L.A., you are from Frisco. So how you identify yourself will vary, depending on the situation.
>
> -John Ogbu, during a discussion on the salience of ethnicity

Rather than operating as a constant in a stagnant field, ethnicity can have different meanings and varying relevance.1 Ethnic boundaries are fluid, allowing the actor some movement, depending upon how he/she perceives the social setting. A situational approach to ethnicity emphasizes its variable nature, converging both the social setting and the cognitive dimension, the structure and the structuring. The coining of the term "situational ethnicity" has been attributed to John Paden in a paper he wrote on ethnic categorization in urban Africa in 1967.2

When do students articulate their ethnicity? When do they suppress or deny it? When does ethnicity make little difference one way or the other?

Ritual

The most obvious vehicle for the expression of ethnic identity occurs each spring at Waterton High during the annual Multicultural Week. During the week volunteers representing various countries or cultural groups made classroom presentations. "In-House" speakers included Waterton High staff who gave up their preparation period to present slide shows and talks about other countries which they had visited. The highlight of the week was the Festival, which included a Potluck Dinner and Talent Show, where students showcased the food, song, dance, and fashion from their homelands.

The festival was greatly enjoyed by the students and their families. It was the one time of the year when differences were celebrated, when the many roots of the Waterton High community were tapped to enlighten and educate. Such attempts to teach cultural understanding, however, have been criticized for focusing upon the superficial aspects of culture, rather than looking at culture as the "dynamic, creative, and continuous process that gives meaning to people's lives."3 This is perhaps a fitting criticism of Multicultural Week at Waterton High. Not only the festival, but the slide shows and lectures from classroom presenters tended to highlight the more exotic aspects of culture without relating the information to the everyday realities of what it is like to be, say, a Hmong teenager living in Waterton. At the very least, though, the week, and especially the festival, provided the forum for students to display a part of their culture, superficial or otherwise, in which they take great pride.

Conflict

As Joan Vincent has indicated, besides ritual, the salience

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of ethnicity over other components of an individual's identity may be related to situations of confrontation or crisis.4 At Waterton High, when conflict arose, the significance of race increased dramatically as suppressed prejudicial feelings surfaced. Commenting on the prejudice of fellow students, Kathleen (white) had noted that "it seems like if you're a different color and we get into an argument, it just brings out your race more than it normally would." People notice the race of the other party more in a conflict situation. They are also apt to feel their own race or ethnicity more sharply.

The following example points to the fluidity of ethnic articulation in a conflict situation. Sharon, whose mother is Mexican and whose father is Anglo, was asked if there were ever times when she felt more Mexican, other times when she felt more white. She responded by describing her reaction to the news of a white friend, Chip, who was attacked by a group of Mexican boys, apparently without provocation:

> There are times. It sounds dumb or weird, but my freshman year when Chip got hurt, I felt so much anger inside me that I was no longer a Mexican. I was white. If my race can do that, then I can do just the opposite and no longer be one of them. So I was no longer a Mexican.
>
> And then when the whites turned around and beat the hell out of a black guy - the black guy was going out with a white girl and the white guys didn't like that - I told 'em, 'You guys are so damned prejudice, it's not even funny. People are people, whether they're white, black, Chinese, Mexican, or what. Everybody has feelings. You guys don't understand that.' As far as I'm concerned, I'm not white, I'm not Mexican, I'm ME!

Far from being "dumb or weird," Sharon's reaction sounded very understandable. When people behaved in an abhorrent manner, motivated by prejudice or racism, Sharon wanted to disassociate

herself completely from the perpetrators. She felt ashamed of that part of her which is Mexican when it was the Mexicans committing the violence against Chip, and she felt ashamed of that part of her which is white when the whites beat up the black boy. The only solution which brought her piece of mind was to deny both parts, to claim an identity that recognizes neither.

Choice

Students of mixed heritage would appear to have the capacity to choose which heritage they wish to articulate. Although many would like to believe that they have a choice, institutional racism dictates that their prime identity will be that part of them that belongs to the most oppressed group, if that part is physically recognizable. For example, children of one black and one white parent will usually be considered "black" because they possess some physical features which identify them as being connected to that group. On the other hand, there is someone like Sharon, who carries the surname of her Anglo father. Her features are not particularly Spanish or Indian, and therefore, she has a fair degree of choice in articulating or suppressing her Mexican heritage. Still, however, she needs to come to terms with both sides of her heritage. Marcy, also with a Mexican mother and Anglo father, described her resentment of having to identify herself one way or the other as a young girl:

> When I was in elementary school, everybody wanted to know what race you were. The kids would ask. If you weren't this and that, they couldn't talk to you...
>
> In Junior High, (we had) a mixed group: two Mexicans, a Filipino, and two white girls. We all hung around together and it didn't bother us at all. And I was so happy because nobody in the group cared what their nationality was. Everybody

> used to come up and say, 'What nationality are you?' I'd say 'Mexican.' They'd say, 'Oh, you hang around with Mexican girls?' I'd say, 'No, I hang around with my friends.'

Marcy, then, was choosing to deny any ethnic identity because of the artificial divisions that such an affiliation carried. She resented the narrow-mindedness of peers who chose their friends based upon ethnicity.

Interest

Marcy, the young woman of mixed heritage who resisted ethnic articulation, was later asked if it was ever important to be identified as part of an ethnic group. She responded:

> Well, if you need it. Like to get into certain things. Like Lisa's in MESA (a club for minorities which promotes higher education in math and science). And she got into MESA because she's Filipino. They was looking for nationalities. And that's when she popped out, 'I'm Filipino'... When it is needed, when it is absolutely necessary, we'll claim our nationality. But if it's not necessary, they don't need to know.

When it is needed, when it is absolutely necessary, Marcy explained, she and her friends will assert their ethnic identity. Otherwise, that information is suppressed. Marcy's point illustrates another of the primary reasons that individuals articulate a particular group affiliation, according to the literature on situational ethnicity. The sociological origins of the concept have been traced to the work of Gluckman, who contended that "an individual's membership in a particular group in a particular situation is 'determined' by the values, interests, and motives that influence his behavior in that situation."5 In Marcy's example, Lisa could see how being a member of MESA could benefit her, as she aspired to go to a four-year university.

Interest can be of two types. In the example cited above, it was personal in that the individual stood to gain by articulating her ethnic identity. On other occasions, individuals' decisions may be motivated by their interest in promoting their group. For example, Vinh, a Vietnamese sophomore, decided to run for a class office so that Asians would be better represented on a council that organized school activities. Although Asians had a poor record of winning elected offices at Waterton High, Vinh was determined:

> I just didn't want to see all Blacks. I go to meetings and stuff, and I don't see any Asians, so I said, 'This year I'm gonna run,' and then a lot of my Asian friends started running, and then they won. It'll be fun. I wanted to join a lot of stuff. I want it to look good on my record.

As her last statement indicates, Vinh's interest included a personal one, though her initial incentive stemmed from her desire to see Asians better represented.

Marta, a junior from Mexico, provides another example of an individual motivated by the opportunity to promote the interests of her group. When she made the decision to run for Homecoming Princess, Marta reported that she wanted to show other Mexicans that they could do it. Her friends were too shy to run, but she mustered the courage. Clearly, she was aware that her election to a status role in the school would be more than just a personal victory. In the public eye, she stands for all Mexicans, and in this case, pushed herself to try so that her group could be recognized.

Values

Instances of ethnic articulation based upon ritual, conflict, or interest tended to be easily recognized. The articulation or

suppression of ethnicity based upon values occurred on a more subtle level. In this way, ethnic expression was ubiquitous, as race and ethnicity are fundamental components of an individual's culture. When culture is understood to mean one's system for perceiving, evaluating, believing, and acting,6 the impact of ethnicity upon school performance becomes more evident. Research has indicated that the kind of interaction that a learner has with a school varies significantly by ethnic and cultural background. Students from each of the four major ethnic groups described ways in which their attitudes about school were derived from their cultures and reinforced by the way they are perceived by other groups.

For example, Toan (Vietnamese) explained why he felt more comfortable in his math class, a reason directly tied to his cultural values:

> Math is fun. It makes you think a lot. In science, he doesn't make the students do the work, so most of the students don't do the work. I get more pressure in math and feel more comfortable with that kind of atmosphere. I feel like if they put more pressure on me then I have to keep my work up and keep my grade up...

He enjoys and feels motivated by the pressure to excel from his classmates as well:

> I feel more comfortable in math class because all the students, they compete a lot with you, with everybody. They want to get a good grade. I like the competition. One chapter, I didn't study, and when (the teacher) passed back the test, I didn't do real good, and they kept teasing me...It makes me so embarrassed. The next chapter I got the highest score, and I said to them, 'Are you still competing with me?' and they didn't say anything at all. And I feel so much better. I feel so proud of myself! I did the highest score. No one can be higher than me!

A trio of students, Anh, Kim, and Lena, also were questioned about times when they feel more at home and times when they feel more alienated. Anh is Vietnamese; Kim and Lena are Filipino. They are regarded by their teachers and classmates as "Asians," and resent being lumped together, but claimed to have gotten used to it. The three of them have isolated themselves from the other students for the most part. All of their friends are Asian, and people are accustomed to seeing them only with Asians. They claim that it has "just turned out this way" because there are a lot of Asians in their classes, which are all the honors and upper level classes. "Why," the researcher asked, "are there more Asians in the college prep classes?"

> Because they get pressure from their parents. 'You go to college or else!' If you're Asian, you have a family that feels you should go to college. 'Other things will go away, but your knowledge will always be with you.'

The primary times when Asian students articulated their ethnicity, then, were in relation to school achievement and subsequently, course enrollment, where values associated with their culture affected behavior.

Cultural values can also promote a more lackadaisical attitude toward school work. Marta (Mexican), described by one of her teachers as "brilliant," had mixed feelings about going to college. All of her teachers felt that she would be smart enough. When the researcher asked her if she wanted to go to college, she replied, "Sort of, but you never know what the future will bring." Marta knew of some girls who were qualified to go, but were working at Woolworth's instead. Her friends did not offer encouragement. She had joined MESA, the enrichment program Lisa had joined that encourages minorities to pursue higher education

in math, engineering, and science, but she stopped going to the meetings because they took place during lunch and her friends urged her to join them instead.

Asked why more Hispanic students were not in the college prep course, Marta replied:

> They don't try. Kids from Mexico come to school here and they're put back a year. So a kid graduates when he's nineteen.

"What's the difference between the Mexican kids that go to college and the ones that don't?" the researcher asked. "Their friends influence them," she responded. She then gave examples to support her premise, telling of a student who did go to college, and of all the ones she knew that did not.

Prejudice and Stereotyping

Central to an understanding of the articulation or denial of ethnicity lies an examination of the economic, political, and social inequities that exist in the society. Ethnic groups have been pressured to conform to the cultural standards set by the dominant group, while at the same time they have been denied full participation. These oppositional pressures of incorporation and exclusion are reproduced in the school system which perpetuates enduring secondary discontinuities for the learner who is a member of a subordinate minority.7 On an individual basis, the articulation or denial of ethnicity is strongly affected by an interpretation of the unequal status ascribed to the respective groups. Therefore, racism and classism play a critical role in an understanding of the salience of ethnicity at a multiethnic, urban high school. This final section describes some of the ways that racism and prejudice have surfaced for the students of Waterton High.

Although students felt positively about the diversity of the population at Waterton High, their degree of prejudice and stereotyping was very high. Even the students who boasted of cross-group friendships and expressed a deep appreciation for the opportunity to meet people of different backgrounds were at times overheard uttering derogatory statements that carried raical or ethnic overtones. Racial hostility, though not outwardly displayed, lay just under the surface for many of the Waterton High students.

Thomas (Hispanic) attempted to resist ethnic articulation in an attempt to avoid the stereotyping. When asked the question, "Are there times when you feel more Mexican at school than at other times?" he replied:

> I never really thought about that. I think more of myself as an artist than anything else.

He said that he didn't like to referred to as "that Mexican boy," or to be labeled as a Mexican. He explained:

> Some people think of Mexicans as hot-tempered, a guy walking down the street with a bandana wrapped up on his head, sunglasses, beard, goatee. On the other hand, some people picture Mexicans as somebody with a big old sombrero, taking a siesta.

By far, the majority of the negative comments directed toward an outside group were targeted toward Asian students. Negative comments about Asians were overheard in the presence of teachers, who did nothing to interrupt them. Students could therefore infer that prejudice against Asians was acceptable, unlike prejudice against Blacks. The primary reasons students gave to account for the mistreatment of Asians on their campus was that they were newcomers, they spoke a language that other students did not

understand, they were resented for doing well in school, and they were unlikely to retaliate against their attacker. Vinh (Vietnamese) talked about her feelings regarding the racist attacks:

> It gets to me, but I just forget it because I'm here to study. I'm not here to fight or anything like that. I'm not here to say bad stuff about them. I don't really think they want to fight me. They just think that I'm not going to do anything about it, so they keep on teasing me.
>
> But one time I had a notebook and I turned around to hit this guy 'cause he was saying some really bad stuff, but I said, 'No, I don't want to get in any trouble,' so I just sat back. They know you're not going to do anything, so they just keep teasing...Then he threw something at me, so I took my notebook, to hit him. He was so surprised that I would do something about it that he just stopped!...I just stood up to say something to him, and then the teacher came over.
>
> The funny thing about it, my Asian friends were really surprised! They go, 'Vinh, we saw you! You were so mean!' I said, 'No, he deserved it! The stuff he said - it was terrible!'

The prejudice that blacks experience at Waterton is perceived and articulated in different ways. Sometimes it is on a very subtle level. For example, during an interview with Vernon (black), the following dialogue ensued:

> MS: What would make the school better?
>
> V: If different groups got together.
>
> MS: You mean if people didn't hang out with their own crowd so much?
>
> V: Hang out is okay, but get to know each other, so if you walk back there (gestures to the back of the school where the tough whites congregate), you won't get looked at funny. Or walk through here (indicating where another predominantly white group gathers) you won't get looked at funny.
>
> MS: Does that ever happen to you?
> (With eyes downcast, he nods yes.)

Getting "looked at funny" may sound relatively innocuous, but anyone who has been a minority in a situation like that understands how devastating that kind of oppression can be.

Other students were more vocal about their experiences. By far, the most garrulous account took place during an informal discussion with a group of four black girls. When asked to share what it was like to be a student at Waterton High, all of them spoke animatedly about their complaints, many of which were directed against the teachers, but many more against the white students. The conversation proceeded as follows:

> MS: Do you think certain groups at school have it easier?
>
> Group: Yeah, yeah. White kids have it better.
>
> Lola: They always gettin' what they want 'cause the teachers white. White person hate for a black person to be really big. They hate to see a black person coming up.
>
> Yvette: If you black you have a better chance with a black teacher. Like Mr. Preston - he my nicest teacher. He my only black teacher.
>
> (The others say that there are some nice white teachers, too, and name a few whom they have had.)
>
> Lola: They (whites) get their way. They try to rule.

Later, in the same interview, the conversation continued:

> MS: Is there the same opportunity for everyone here?
>
> Yvette: We'd have a bigger baseball team if you didn't have to have certain grades. Always be the white people that get to play. Probably because some black kids don't like their teachers. Lot of racism. Lot of kids who go here that don't like some of their teachers.
>
> Lola: A lot of black people go out (for sports) then they tell them they got cut because of their grades. Only ones left standing out there is white people. What good is the team?

Whether or not teachers disfavor black students is not the issue here. The main point is that these girls feel that black students are being treated unfairly, and the evidence they see is that the sports team (girls baseball, in this case) has nearly all white players.

Reacting to the Racism: Oppositional Strategies

Perhaps the most notorious group of black students at Waterton high are the group know as the "thugs." These students are recognized as a distinct group by students of all ethnic groups, and none failed to name them when they listed the subgroups of students at Waterton High. They are noticeable for a number of reasons. One is that they position themselves in a very prominent place. Most of the subgroups have staked out a piece of territory where they congregate that becomes known as their turf. The place where the thugs assemble is in a central spot, probably one of the most visible from both the cafeteria and mall where students pass to reach another wing of the building, and from the main doors which lead both to the central office and the other buildings. Also, they tend to take up a lot of space, in terms of expansive gestures, and they tend to be loud, attracting the attention of anyone in a wide periphery.

One of the staff who grew up in the area and has good street knowledge, described the thugs this way:

> They're into intimidation. That's pure street shit. When you're looking for a fight, that's the place to go. Because they're threatened, they're going to go ahead and threaten everybody else. They're threatened by the school. They have limited skills. They haven't had much success at school. They have success in the mall (the central portion of the building from which the classroom wings stem) because they can stand around and make people feel uncomfortable. I've known guys like that all my life. If there're

> enough of them together, they're a danger. Put 'em off one by one, they're basically light weight...When they start talkin' shit, they're not going to do anything, but you got to live on these streets to know that.

What the thugs have done is attempt to transport their street corner behavior and the power it brings them into the school. Pretty much ignored by staff, they have been fairly successful at their reconstruction.

The thugs use intimidation to gain power, and hence status. Although they may basically be harmless, as the staff person above claimed, other students tend to give them a wide berth. In essence, they operate like the subgroups that Lacey has described in Hightown Grammar, which have set themselves up in opposition to the values and norms of the school.8

Students at Waterton had their own theories about why the thugs behave as they do. James (black) offered this explanation:

> Some of it is the community. A lot of 'em live down around (East Waterton)...it's like a drug strip. And that's what they do, mainly on the street, they sell drugs. It's like chess: the king and the queen, they have all the drugs, and they give it to the little kids to go out and sell. That's like them. They're the pawns.
>
> A lot of 'em were my friends since junior high. They came here to high school and they just changed. I'd say, 'I didn't know you did this and that,' and they'd say, 'Yeah, I've been doing it for awhile.'

Most of the students, black included, talked disdainfully about the thugs. Reggie (black), for example, said that he felt uncomfortable at Waterton because there were so many thugs. Reggie said that he used to be in that crowd himself. He would be "okay" at school, then act differently ("loud and stuff") when he would be with his friends. "What changed?" the researcher asked. He replied, "I seen that it wasn't about nothin'."

Their numbers are greatly exaggerated. Reggie estimated that 30% to 40% of the students at Waterton High are thugs. The actual number could never be determined, particularly since the boundaries are hazy as to who is a thug and who isn't, but it certainly is far lower. The particular group of thugs to whom most students refer when they offer descriptions of the subgroup is a group of about four boys whom the researcher observed on many occasions involved in animated conversations at the site that was pointed out as their turf. Although there are more than four, these four were perhaps the archetypes.

Robert talked about his group this way:

> I don't know why, but people think my group is the dangerous one. That ain't really my group. We don't do anything but laugh, take care of our business, and when we get out of school, take care of our other business.
>
> I don't go around messing with people that I know ain't going to mess with me, so I let them alone, and they let me alone. I don't pay no attention to the groups. We don't do nothin' but laugh and talk about each other. That's all.

The researcher sensed that Robert was reluctant to describe himself, so she asked that he describe his friends:

> They younger. They at the age when they shy...They watch out for themselves. They ain't really violent. They don't do nothin' violent. They don't like to. If we have to - we gotta watch out for one another. You mess with one, you gotta mess with the other.

When the researcher asked Robert who the leaders were at the school, he responded this way:

> Everybody look up to me and ain't nobody I look up to. Everybody look up to me, and I don't know why - like I'm going to bully 'em. White, Mexican, Vietnamese - they all look up to me. I name myself. Ain't sayin' it just to be, you know...(boastful)

"What about you gives you that quality?" the researcher inquired. His response:

> When I was younger, I was a bully. I fight all my life. I was a bully, but I gave it up. What's the use of hurtin' people for no reason? I know what I could do to a person, but it's hard for a person to do it to me. I been hit by a big old, strong man that just got out of jail. A big, old man! He can't hurt me, so I know no teenager can. So I just left 'em alone. I don't mess with 'em. They leave me and my peoples alone, they get left alone.

Asking Robert to reflect some more on his past, the researcher asked him why he used to be a bully. His account:

> Oooo, I don't know...Just something I grew up with. Everybody goes through stages. Some go through girl stages, some go through bullying stages. I had to go through bully stages - girls didn't like to mess with me when I was young. Now I can get 'em any time I want. Back then they never used to like to mess with me. I was one of the 'ugly ducklings.' But I grew up. I can get 'em any time I want 'em now. It's comfortable.

Robert has found a way to feel comfortable, a quality that is keenly important to him. Working outside the traditional structure, he has fashioned a lifestyle for himself that has garnered him status and power.

What it Means to be White: Defensive

Whites, who are the majority, both in terms of numbers and in terms of power in this society, are in the minority at Waterton High. Some of the white students take this in stride. Stan, for example, when asked how it feels to be a minority at Waterton, replied, "It's not like there's really any other way." He has always attended schools where whites were a minority, and he doesn't find it particularly strange. Somewhat facetiously he added:

> It'd be dull without the hassles, like the stuff that happens outside the front of the school.

The "stuff" to which Stan refers is the verbal jeering he at times experiences from the group of black boys who gather in the front of the school and have, on occasion, made a sport of taunting whites who pass by.

Many of the white students feel uncomfortable being in the minority. Kathleen (white) described her experience of coming to Waterton High after her high school was closed due to declining enrollments in the district:

> At Joiner, we didn't pay that much attention to race. Here, it's 'white bitch!' They blame you because you're white. They make you feel very inferior...I guess there's fear placed in you.

Steve, whose best friends are black, said that he had talked to a lot of white students who felt that way, even though he did not. He never heard them talk about their discomfort directly, however. Instead, he would hear them say that they ought to transfer to one of the other schools in the district where the white population is in the majority, which is what a couple of his friends have, in fact, done.

The students who are the most uncomfortable being white are probably those who grew up in Westland, the working class city which borders Waterton, which has always been predominantly white, and in more recent years, Hispanic. Tina, for example, is a student who has been assaulted by a black student at Waterton. Her experience no doubt taints her surmisal of what it is like to be white:

> It's real unbalanced. It's like we're the minority. I have black friends, too, but there are those black people, when they're in groups, they'll pick on you. They're always in a group,

> and it's never equal. They only start stuff when there's more of them. It's really like that, too.

Kathleen intimated that some of the Westland whites are responsible for the hostile reactions they get from the black students:

> White people - 'rockers' - they act like, 'We're bad! Don't mess with me!' A friend of mine got jumped by seven black dudes. There's a lot of defensiveness. Makes him put on a big front.

When asked how she personally felt about being white, she said:

> It's weird. In elementary school, most of the kids were white. Then at (junior high), Whoa! It was a different feeling. Aren't that many whites.
>
> The whites here are scummy. They wear scum-bum clothes. They don't try to fit in. Like 'Rebel Without a Cause.' Like, 'Hey, I'm white - Try to mess with it!' And people do.

Still contrasting the whites at Waterton to those at Joiner, Kathleen went on to explain:

> Come here, people are advertising that they're white, and proud of it. At a school like Waterton High, that's not something you want to go all out about.

The above comments were spoken during an interview that took place in November at a time that was still characterized with the many adjustments that were being made, particularly by the students from Joiner. In a subsequent interview with Kathleen in April, the researcher again inquired how it felt to be white, and whether Kathleen's earlier feelings had changed. Her response:

> No, we're still basically a minority at this school!

Still, Kathleen talked about how different intergroup relations were at Joiner:

> We all knew what race we were, and it just seemed it didn't matter to anybody. You come here, and people all act big and bad. The white people kind

> of throw it in each other's faces. They've got a real rebellious attitude, I guess. Instead of just trying to fit in with everybody.

When asked to explain more about what she meant, Kathleen referred again to the way that some of the white students dress and act. "The white guys," she said, "have long hair, rocker T-shirts. They're loud, prejudiced." Some of the white girls who are part of that crowd also wear the rocker T-shirts, tight jeans.

> It's dress style that really does it. You can spot a white person a mile away by the way they're dressed.

And the attitude:

> White people are like, 'I'm white, so what. Mess with me and I'll beat you up, I'll kill you,' something like that...I'd never fit in with that lifestyle.

And finally, summing up how the experience has affected whites:

> I don't get that much flack (as a white student). A couple of my friends have gotten picked on because they're white. I guess that just has to make you a lot tougher than what you really are.

CONCLUSION

There are times when ethnicity assumes prominence and other times when its articulation is deemed unimportant or even inappropriate. Individuals carry a whole range of status identities within their composite selves and have some degree of choice as to which status identity to articulate in a given situation. This judgement is based upon the individual's estimation of the relevancy of ethnicity, an estimation linked to structural factors in the society. For the students of Waterton High, ethnic articulation stemmed around issues of ritual,

conflict, interest, and values. The denial of one's ethnic identity centered around racism and internalized oppression.

Concerning the suppression of ethnicity, students reported that they attempted to disassociate themselves from their group in order to avoid being stereotyped. This denial, then, stems from the racism in the society which creates and perpetuates the negative stereotypes that become associated with particular groups. When the oppression which exists in the society becomes internalized, that is, when negative aspects about oppressed groups become part of the belief systems of the members of those groups, these individuals assume a dislike for their own ethnic or racial group, plus they dislike that part of themselves which carries that identification. This was the case with Sharon, the young woman of mixed heritage, who sought to deny her Mexican side when her fellow Mexicans shamed her, and conversely, her white side when whites performed acts of which she disapproved.

On the other hand, ethnic articulation could become pronounced during conflict situations. For example, an argument between two students who happened to be of different races could quickly assume racial overtones, even though race per se had nothing to do with the argument originally. Interest was another factor which affected ethnic articulation, both in terms of promoting one's personal interests and that of the entire group. Lisa, for example, who normally downplayed her Filipino heritage, claimed this status in order to qualify for a club that could help her meet her goals for higher education. Marta reported that she ran for homecoming princess in order to bring some recognition to her ethnic group.

One interesting distinction among the groups was noted. For Asian and Hispanic students, the salience of ethnicity emerged more often on an intragroup level, whereas for the Black and white students, it was on an intergroup level. That is, Asian and Hispanic students felt a closer association with their ethnicity during times when they were interacting with their own group members. Black and white students, however, felt this association more often when they came in contact with each other.

One explanation is that Blacks and whites have experienced a long history of intergroup struggle. Blacks have been the victims of racism ever since they were incorporated into the society, a situation which persists. Because white students constitute a minority in terms of their numbers at Waterton High, they are keenly aware of their historical position. Moreover, the local history of particular sectors of Blacks and whites in Waterton has been one of fairly acute antagonisms. Thus, these relationships that exist in the society are reproduced at school. While Hispanics and Asians have also been subjected to oppression, their circumstances differed. Primarily, this difference stemmed from the fact that they are newcomers. Hispanic students who have recently moved to Waterton from Mexico or Central America and Asian students who are refugees from Southeast Asia, in particular, have had less time to become acculturated and tended to isolate themselves from other groups. Also, a common native language gave these students a strong sense of cultural unity.

The articulation or suppression of ethnicity based upon values occurred on a more subtle level because values are connected to an individual's culture. As such, they formulate his/her system for perceiving, evaluating, believing, and acting.

The impact of culture, and consequently ethnicity upon schooling cannot be appreciated until educators embrace its subtle articulation. Therefore, a key recommendation derived from this study is that educators read and/or listen to personal accounts of what it is like for students from various ethnic groups to be a member of the school community from the perspective of that group. By having a clearer understanding of how students in a multiethnic, urban high school come to terms with the societal structuring that defines their roles, educators will be able to make a more informed response to the needs of their constituency.

Notes

1. Jonathan Y. Okamura, "Situational Ethnicity" Ethnic and Racial Studies. Volume 4, No. 4, 1981, p. 452.

2. John N. Paden, "Situational Ethnicity in Urban Africa with Special References to the Heusa" Paper presented at the African Studies Association Meeting, New York, November 1967, cited in Jonathan Y. Okamura, ibid, p. 452.

3. Steven F. Arvizu, Demystifying the Concept of Culture: Theoretical and Conceptual Tools, Monograph I. California State University, Sacramento: Cross-Cultural Resource Center. May 1978, p.4.

4. Joan Vincent, "The Structuring of Ethnicity" Human Organization Volume 33, No. 4, 1974, p. 377.

5. Max Gluckman, "The Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand" African Studies. Volume 14, 1940, pp. 1-30, cited in Jonathan Y. Okamura, op.cit., p. 453.

6. This definition of culture is attributed to Ward H. Goodenough in Culture, Language and Society. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1971, cited in Margaret A. Gibson, "Approaches to Multicultural Education in the United States: Some Concepts and Assumptions" Anthropology and Education Quarterly. Volume 7, No.4.

7. The concept of secondary discontinuities pertaining to subordinate minorities is attributed to John U. Ogbu in The Next Generation. New York: Academic Press, 1974.

8. Colin Lacey, Hightown Grammar: The School as a Social System. Manchester, England: The University Press, 1970.

9. Carleton E. Brown, The True Purposes of Multicultural Education. Portsmouth, N.H.: New England Teacher Corps Network, 1976; Alfredo Castaneda, et al., The Educational Needs of Minority Groups. Lincoln, Nebraska: Professional Educators Publications, Inc., 1974; Steven F. Arvizu, "Demystifying the Concept of Culture: Theoretical and Conceptual Tools" Sacramento, California: Cross-Cultural Resource Center, California State University, 1978.

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